

SCHOOL DECISION GUIDE

PROVIDED BY:



Hello Parents,

Life moves fast! First words turn into first steps, and suddenly it's time to send your "big kid" to school, and you have no idea where they should go. Who should you trust with your most precious asset? The answer is not always clear.

Making a school decision is especially challenging now, with the changes that are constantly occurring in education. What is the difference between public and private schools? At what age should children ideally start formal education? What are the charter, voucher, and district rules? And the biggest question of all is, **what's best for my child?** Every child is unique, and what works for one may not work for another - even within the same family. It's easy to get overwhelmed.

Now, here's the good news. **You're not alone.**

At The Oaks Academy, we've had thousands of conversations with parents over the years, and have helped them turn "decision overwhelm" into "confident direction" whether they have ultimately chosen The Oaks or not. In this guide, we share the practical tips for walking through the school decision-making process that we have been sharing with parents for years. We hope this guide will help bring you clarity and peace of mind.

Yes, we are a school ourselves, and, of course, we hope you'll consider us. However, above all, we want you to find the right school where your child can grow and develop for years to come. Our hope this guide will help you with your school decision!

Please let us know if you have questions,

Your friends at The Oaks Academy

PART 1: WHAT DO I VALUE MOST?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read through each of the criteria and definitions.
2. Reflect on which criteria are of most interest and value to you and your family.
3. Select other adults to give input such as your spouse or co-parent, grandparents, pastor, coaches, neighbors, or friends.
4. Have each adult involved rank the criteria.
10 = highest importance 1 = lowest importance
5. Calculate totals for the criteria. The higher the number, the higher the priority for the adults involved in the decision.

Note: If you feel your child is old enough, discuss these topics with them, and have them participate in the ranking process. They may appreciate feeling like they are a part of the school selection process.

CRITERIA

(see definitions on next page)

NAMES

TOTAL

Openness and Hospitality						
Quality of Faculty						
Academic Results						
Character Results						
Cost and Scholarships						
Location and Convenience						
Faith						
Educational Philosophy						
Safety						
Enrichment Opportunities						
Diversity						
Curriculum						
Appropriate Use of Technology						
Student-To-Teacher Ratio, Class Size						
Overall Trust						

CRITERIA DEFINITIONS

OPENNESS AND HOSPITALITY

A school that is open and welcoming to parents will be the most comfortable long term - one that genuinely wants to know you and sees you as your child's first teacher. The most nurturing environments are those where you can know the teachers well and regularly interact with them about your child's development. Does the school feel warm, friendly, community-oriented, or does it feel like more of an institution?

QUALITY OF FACULTY

According to the Economic Policy Institute, teacher quality is "the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement." Master teachers who not only know their subjects well but are experts at helping discover the God-given talents of your child will help you shape their impressionable minds as they grow. Great teachers want to know and love your child and see them just as you do, with incredible value now, not only in who they are becoming.

ACADEMIC RESULTS

While test numbers can be important, you may consider how often a school does test prep and how much pressure there is around standardized tests. Ask questions about where students attend high school and how many students attend college. You want a school where graduates succeed not only academically in high school, college, and graduate school, but are also thoughtful, healthy, and engaged adults.

CHARACTER BUILDING

School plays an important part in developing not only the mind of your child but helps develop their values and character. Look at the role of discipline in a school and how they work with your children over the years to create strong habits that will serve them well throughout their life, while also building strong executive function skills. You want your child to develop into a young adult who has the character to succeed in their high school, college, life, and career.

COST AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Cost can be a significant factor in any school decision, but be sure to consider financial aid and ask about each school's plan to make school affordable before ruling it out. In Indiana, qualifying families can receive state-scholarships (known as "vouchers") to pay for tuition. As you consider cost, be sure to ask questions about how scholarships are distributed and if you qualify for financial aid.

LOCATION & CONVENIENCE

Consider the school's location in regards to your home, work, relatives, and friends. Schools often offer before and after school care that can accommodate different schedules. You may also inquire if you make a 'reservation' for your child or can simply drop off early or pick up late if needed on a particular day.

FAITH

If faith or certain values are important in your life this may be a factor you want to rank at the high end of your priorities. Do you want your children around adults who are strong in their faith and values? If so, does the school have a particular affiliation or not? Ask questions about how faith plays out in the classroom and school culture.

CRITERIA DEFINITIONS

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

What values and philosophies are constant threads in the classroom? You'll want to consider if there is a clear educational philosophy throughout the school culture. Do they use behaviorism? Consider their view of children, the role of the parents and teachers in education, and how they discipline students.

SAFETY

Safety is not all about metal detectors and police officers. Some of the strongest deterrents are strong relationships, and a community feel - where adults know what is going on in the hallways and have a deep understanding of family and social dynamics. A loving and joy-filled school culture can help prevent bullying and other micro-tensions that can lead to safety concerns.

ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Activities offered outside of the school day enhance the school experience. Find out what sports, clubs, and enrichment opportunities await your child. You may ask who coaches and teaches these enrichment Activities, their training, and their association with the school.

DIVERSITY

How diverse is the school racially and economically? Does the school value and celebrate diversity? Will your children be comfortable but also challenged so they grow into adults who value difference and can build relationships across the lines that too often divide our society?

CURRICULUM

Evaluate how the curriculum is selected and the quality of texts and materials your child will use. Do you see books and ideas presented that have "stood the test time?" Does the curriculum encourage critical thinking or rote memorization? Are teachers inspiring children to fall in love with learning or only trying to hold their attention?

APPROPRIATE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

An abundance of research confirms that too much screen time for young children causes tremendous challenges in later years around attention, emotional regulation, and more. Further, the most critical factor in a child's education is a human connection with strong faculty members. Evaluate whether the school is relying on computers or teachers to convey essential material?

STUDENT-TO-TEACHER RATIO AND CLASS SIZE

The best way to ensure your child receives more personalized attention and care is a lower student-to-teacher ratio and class size. How many children are in one classroom, and how many instructors are with them? Your student will have a different experience if they are one of 30 children in a classroom with a single teacher (ratio of 1:30) versus one of 18 in a room with two teachers (ratio of 1:9).

OVERALL TRUST

At the end of the day, do you trust the school to love and care for your children? Will it be a good 'home' for your child for many years? Do they understand education well, and will they work tirelessly to know and love your child, giving them a bright future?

PART 2: WHICH SCHOOL REFLECTS WHAT I VALUE MOST?

INSTRUCTIONS

Now that you have a framework to evaluate the factors that contribute to making a confident school decision, use the guide below to compare and contrast those criteria between the schools you are considering.

- 1. Choose your top 7 criteria and circle them on the list.
- 2. Write the names of the schools you are considering across the top.
- 3. As you explore each school by reading their websites, meeting their staff members, and taking tours, grade each school from 1 - 10 using 10 as the highest score (which means they exceed your expectations on that criteria) and 1 as the lowest (which means they do not meet that criteria).

CRITERIA (circle top 7)

	SCHOOL NAME					
Openness and Hospitality						
Quality of Faculty						
Academic Results						
Character Results						
Cost and Scholarships						
Location and Convenience						
Faith						
Educational Philosophy						
Safety						
Enrichment Opportunities						
Diversity						
Curriculum						
Appropriate Use of Technology						
Student-To-Teacher Ratio, Class Size						
Overall Trust						
TOTAL						
TOP 7 TOTAL						

PART 3: THE RESULTS

YOUR RESULTS

Tally the scores in each of the columns you selected to see how each school ranks. Remember that the school with the most points might not be your best fit. Your best fit will be found by tallying your top 7 criteria in the boxes below the total school score. The "Top 7" score should bring you closest to the school that offers what you value most.

MAKING YOUR DECISION

As you look at your totals, you'll begin to see which schools are meeting the criteria you prioritized for your child and your family. If the numbers are close, then you have a hard decision to make. If you are still unsure, try the following:

- Schedule a second in-person or virtual tour. Often, when the decision is narrowed down, you will be able to see things more clearly during the second review visit.
- Talk to parents of current and former students. Alumni will often provide an honest evaluation of their school experience and will be able to speak about the impact of the school on their growth and development.
- Request a meeting with a school leader or admissions staff member to ask specific questions about your criteria.
- Reassess the importance of the criteria - often an experience at a school (good or bad) can change how you feel about whether or not you could see your family there.
- Consider the 'weight' of each criteria. If something is of particular importance to you (i.e. student to teacher ratio), then allow that to carry more weight in the conversation. Not all criteria are equal.

Thanks for using our School Decision Guide. We hope that this process helps you navigate the many school options available to you as you discover the right school for your child. As always, our hope is that you find the place where your student and family can thrive - whether that is The Oaks Academy or not.

If you have further questions about the school search process or would like more information about The Oaks Academy, please don't hesitate to reach out to our admissions team at admissions@theoaksacademy.org or (317) 610-0880.